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ABSTRACT

This report represents a synthesis of data related to the impact of the Parent Education Follow Through (PEFT) Program in the Yakima (Washington) School District. It was compiled from reviews of written documents and interviews with both model sponsor staff and parents, teachers, community leaders and others within the Yakima School District. The program, in which paraprofessionals and parent educators worked with children in kindergarten and first grade classrooms and with their mothers in the homes, is briefly described. The political, economic and ethnic characteristics of the community and school staff are noted. The community's response to the program is said to be generally positive. It is concluded that the PEFT program is a dynamic force for institutional and social change within the Yakima community. Factors contributing to the apparent success of the program are discussed, along with some criticisms leveled at the program. (Author/BH)

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An In-depth Study of the Impact of the Parent Education Follow Through Program on Yakima, Washington

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Introduction

The development of the Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFT) is based primarily on the beliefs that parents are the first and best teachers of their own children and that the home is the most long-lasting learning inst tution a child experiences (Olmsted, 1977). Recent studies have supported these beliefs through findings which indicate the importance of considering factors such as the home and the community when attempting to improve children's academic performance. These studies suggest that schools may no longer presume to assume the full responsibility for the education of children (Gordon, 1977, 1977-78). For instance, Palmer's (1977) work shows that by helping parents to become proficient teachers of their children that we can positively effect the performance of those children in school. The work of Keeves' (1975) and others reveals that factors outside the school and classroom account for at least 50 percent of the variance in students' achievement.

Though recent reports (Anderson, 1977; House, 1977) have shown that children in our program have made significant achievement gains in academic areas, these reports did not attempt to document the most significant or unique aspects of our program. These aspects include such things as the impact of the program on the family, the school system, and the community. Concern with documenting the most significant or unique aspects of the PEFT program and the realization that the effects of the program vary from community to community led to the design of a series of studies using ethnographic techniques. It was felt that such studies would be an exploratory step in determining what impact the PEFT program is having within the various communities in which it is being implemented.

Procedures

This report represents a synthesis of data related to the impact of the PEFT program in the Yakima School District, Yakima, Washington. It was compiled from reviews of written documents and interviews with both model sponsor staff and persons within the Yakima School District.

The model sponsor staff interviewed were those directly involved with implementation of the program in Yakima. Those interviewed within the Yakima School District were chosen by the PEFT staff there. The 21 PEFT parents and three non-PEFT parents interviewed were selected by a modified random selection procedure. Additional persons interviewed were nine Parent Educators (PEs), eleven PEFT teachers, seven non-PEFT teachers, four principals, eleven central office staff, four community leaders, and seven others who were involved in related programs. In all 77 of 90 individuals (or 86%) scheduled to be interviewed were able to keep their interview appointments.

The majority of interviews were conducted in a private office at the central administration building. A few parents were interviewed in their homes while most teachers were interviewed in their classrooms.

It was explained to each person interviewed that the model sponsor wished to obtain his or her evaluation of the PEFT program, most specifically that related to the effects of the program in the following four areas: (1) the Yakima community in general, (2) comprehensive services including career development, (3) the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), and (4) the family. It was also stressed that the model sponsor would be interested in anything that s/he might wish to say about the program that did not fall into one of these three areas.

All legal and ethical requirements regarding consent and privacy were observed.

Setting

Geographically, Yakima lies approximately half-way between Seattle and Spokane (Home and school interact, 1977). It is bounded on the east by the Yakima River and on the west by the Cascade Range. The population of the City of Yakima is approximately 48,000; the population of its entire metropolitan area is approximately 80,000.

Industry in this area is predominately agriculture oriented; other businesses are primarily of a professional or service nature. Fluctuations in the agriculture base cause a high degree of unemployment in Yakima compared to the rest of the State of Washington--10 percent year around and as high as 15 percent in the winter months. About one-third of the elementary school students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches.

The Yakima School District currently enrolls approximately 12,000 students and employs 600 building level teachers and administrators plus Central Office Staff.

The funding of the Yakima School District reflects the rather conservative economic and political climate of the Yakima Valley. However, administrators are proud of the fact that while, traditionally, the per pupil cost in the District has been somewhat below the State average, District-wide achievement scores have been above the State average.

The bicentennial theme for the Yakima School District, officially adopted by the School Board, was "Parents, Community, and Educators as Partners." A belief in the viability of this partnership is the cornerstone of a philosophy which permeates all aspects of the Yakima School District (Parents, community and educators as partners, 1976).

Description of the Innovation

The 1977-78 school year was the PEFT program's tenth year of operation in Yakima (Follow Through application for school year 1977-78, 1977, pp. 27). In 1977-78 it involved 34 K-3 classrooms and served 687 low income and 215 above low income children. The economic and ethnic characteristics of the target population are presented in Table 1.

One certified teacher and two paraprofessional parent educators were employed in each kindergarten and first grade classroom. In second and third grade classrooms only one parent educator was employed because of financial constraints imposed through several years of a stationary level of funding. The parent educators worked with the children in the classroom and with their mothers (or "mothering ones") in the homes. Families with children in the kindergarten or first grade received weekly home visits from a parent educator; families of children in second or third grade classrooms received biweekly home visits.

The ethnic characteristics of PEFT teachers and PEs are shown in Table 2.

The PEFT program director in Yakima was employed half-time in that position and half-time as building principal of a PEFT school. Her administrative support staff included three full-time and one half-time person in the capacities of clerk, bookkeeper, and secretary. Other PEFT program support staff included trained substitute teachers, two parent educator trainers, one nurse and one health aide, and a psychologist. Additional funds within the PEFT program budget were appropriated for one-half of the nine PEFT kindergarten teachers' salaries so that they might teach a single session rather than the double session that the other district kindergarten teachers taught. Other funds within the budget were allocated for parent

Table 1

Economic and Ethnic Characteristics of Target Population

1977-78

	N	%
Economic Characteristics		
Qualified: Head Start and low income	687	6.2
Non-Qualified	15	3.8
Ethnic Characteristics		
Black	80	8.8
Chicano	180	20.0
Native American	21	2.4
Oriental	3	.3
White	618	68.5
TOTAL	902	100.0

Table 2

Ethnic Characteristics of Teachers and Parent Educators

1977-78

	Teachers		Parent Educators	
	N	%	N	%
Black	2	6	8	15
Chicano	4	11	7	13
Hawaiian	1	3	0	0
White	28	80	39	72
TOTAL	35	100	54	100

activities (including travel, supplies, and babysitting), contractual medical and dental care, and nutrition supplies.

The total 1977-78 PEFT program budget in Yakima was $560,970. Of this amount, $448,776 was federal funds while $112,194 was contributed by the Yakima School District in the form of either in-kind-services or actual funds.

General Discription of Introduction and Implementation

The PEFT program was apparently chosen by the Yakima School District in 1968 for primarily two reasons: (1) it presented a new way to effect student achievement gains, and (2) some of those most influential in the District administration had always had an underlying philosophy of a home-school partnership. At that time there was some skepticism among many in the District who were uncomfortable having parents assume such a significant role in the schools' affairs.

It is especially interesting, therefore, to note that those who admitted this original skepticism were among those who in describing the evolution of the PEFT program in Yakima since 1968 indicated that one of the most significant developments was the degree to which parent involvement in the schools, or the home-school partnership, had become such a comfortable concept for all concerned--parents, students, and educators.

In addition to the administrative support and felt need previously mentioned, several other factors appear to have contributed to the speed with which the program was originally implemented, the success with which it has been maintained, and the diffusion of its concepts throughout the District. One of these was the demand for compliance, accompanied by support, from the model sponsor. Another has been the fact that the PEFT program coordinator in Yakima has always held a position in the District's administrative

hierarchy equal to, or above that, of the building principals with whom s/he must work to implement the program. Also a significant factor has been the absence of both tenure laws in the State of Washington and teachers' unions within the Yakima School District which allows the replacement or reassignment of staff members who are not philosophically or practically meeting the demands of the PEFT program. Another factor has been the District policy of regularly rotating building principals which would seem to remove the negative connotations of reassignment and, also, insure the dissemination of PEFT concepts into non-PEFT schools. Finally, morale among staff members and their regard for the District and PEFT administration seemed to be high.

The PEFT program has been placed in schools in low-income areas of the District. Administrators have justified this by reasoning that the program is serving those children and families with the greatest need, but this has caused some stigma to be attached to placement in the program. The infusion of a few middle-income children from overcrowded schools into PEFT classrooms, and the District administration's efforts at communicating the essence of the program to the community, have only partially alleviated this stigma.

At schools where not all primary classrooms participate in the program, PEFT classrooms have often become "stacked" with "problem children." Despite the program coordinator's suggestions to the contrary, principals have tended to place children whom they feel have greater academic or personal needs in PEFT classrooms where they will have more adult contact.

The placement of the program in predominately low-income schools and the "stacking" of some PEFT classrooms have caused difficulties with evaluation. It has been impossible to establish suitable control groups for

evaluation purposes either by school or by classroom. This would, apparently, present the most difficulty in the analysis of data from the standardized achievement tests given in the areas of reading and mathematics.

During the ten years that the PEFT program has existed in the Yakima School District, adaptations of the program have been necessary because of reduced or stationary levels of funding. The adaptations, such as limiting second and third grade classrooms to one parent educator, may have stunted the model in the purest sense, but are within the bounds of continued implementation of the essential components of the model. The adaptations necessitated by reduced funding may even have allowed the program to appropriately evolve as PEFT staff and families have become more sophisticated in their understandings of the basic PEFT program concepts.

Effects of the Parent Education Follow Through Program

The Community. Evidence of the effects of the PEFT program on program development and attitude change within the Yakima School District may be seen in the positive expressions of support by PEFT families and staff, other District staff, and other community people. The most tangible evidence is, however, at least 21 documented "spin-off" programs and activities which have been instituted on a volunteer basis, with District funds, or for which other outside sources of funding have been sought.

Communication between the District and the community regarding the PEFT program has apparently been excellent; every person interviewed was familiar with the program and most appeared to understand its emphases. Two PEFT parents raised harsh criticisms of various aspects of the program which seemed, primarily, to reflect their lack of understanding of the program's objectives. Because it was impossible to determine the extent to which these parents may have reflected the feelings of others, their

criticisms bear consideration and suggest that further efforts at communication may be necessary.

Comprehensive Services. The effects of the program in the areas of comprehensive services appear to be most positive in the areas of career development and the delivery of auxiliary services. The PEFT program has served as a career ladder, most significantly, for low-income parents and female staff members. The efficient coordination of community resources and PEFT resources for the successful delivery of auxiliary services was verified, repeatedly, by parents.

The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC). The PEFT staff has taken many steps to insure the success of the PACs through increased staff and parent participation. Many of these steps have been perceived as paternalistic at best, and condescending at worst, by some of the parents. Though these parents appeared to be small minority, it was not possible to accurately assess the extent of these perceptions among the PEFT parents. It is clear, however, that this is a matter of some concern for both PEFT staff and parents.

The Family. The effects of the model related to changes in family life were reported to be very positive. It is encouraging that PEFT staff, PEFT families, and those who are no longer PEFT participants all attest to the long-term, diffuse effects of the program on their families' lives.

It was repeatedly asserted by those interviewed that the PEFT Program in Yakima has:

(1) improved the self-concepts of those related to the program in various roles,

(2) improved the quality of parent/child interaction,

(3) improved the quality of home/school communication,

(4) improved the interactions among peoples of different socio-economic backgrounds,

(5) helped low-income and minority parents become advocates for themselves,

(6) helped low-income parents become independently functioning members of society, and,

(7) so completely diffused throughout the Yakima School District that its concepts permeate all aspects of the District's functioning.

These positive assertions along with the criticisms leveled at the PEFT program, and the staff's concern with the criticisms of the program, indicate that the PEFT program is a dynamic force for institutional and social change within the Yakima community.

Through it was impossible, given the limitations of this study, to define with precision why the PEFT model has been so well received and implemented within the Yakima community, there was a "sense" of some of the contributing factors.

(1) Yakima is relatively isolated geographically which forces its residents to be or become community centered.

(2) Yakima is conservative, politically and economically, and its residents are more likely to respond to a program over which they feel they have control and which they feel they can adapt to their needs.

(3) Yakima residents express a feeling of responsibility for "taking care of their own" which they attribute to their conservative nature.

(4) Yakima, because of its periodic economic depressions, has not had an influx of "outsiders" who might agitate for change. The community is "at peace" with itself.

(5) Yakima has little if any, bussing to its elementary schools; because families live in the neighborhoods where their children attend school, it is possible to develop a sense of community spirit with the school as the focal point.

(6) Yakima's middle-income parents find the concept of "parents as partners" appealing, and they are anxious to improve their parenting skills. This is a large segment of Yakima's population, and they have supported the concepts of the PEFT program and lobbied for the extension of these concepts into their own schools.

(7) Yakima's low-income parents support the program for all the reasons previously named, but also because the gaps between socio-economic factions within the community have never grown so wide that they were impossible to bridge.

(8) Yakima's school officials genuinely believe in the efficacy of a home/school partnership. They work very hard to disseminate this notion throughout the community, and they attempt to incorporate it into all District programs and activities. This belief originally grew out of their search for ways to improve students' achievement in academic areas; but that concern has, apparently, become secondary.

(9) Yakima's PEFT program coordinators have had both the authority, through their placement in the administrative hierarchy, and

the respect, through their extremely positive relationships with other staff members, to successfully and appropriately implement the program.

The Parent Education Follow Through Program works in Yakima because it works for Yakima. It is difficult to conceive of a community in which the program could have been more completely and successfully implemented.

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